



# LUIS G. FORTUÑO

RESIDENT COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE NEWSLETTER



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

\$825 Million for Transportation  
and Infrastructure Projects \_\_\_\_\_ 2A

### EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

Working Hard in the Committee  
on Education \_\_\_\_\_ 2B

### FORT BUCHANAN

Efforts Result in Permanence  
of Fort \_\_\_\_\_ 3A

### VETERANS

First Phase of New Hospital  
Closer than Ever \_\_\_\_\_ 3B

### STATUS

Next the White House Report \_\_\_\_\_ 5A

### FAITH BASED AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Inauguration of Municipal  
Liaison Offices \_\_\_\_\_ 5B

### HEALTH

Medicare Parity  
Closer than Ever \_\_\_\_\_ 6A

**ENVIRONMENT**  
PROTECTING EL YUNQUE  
AND EL KARSO \_\_\_\_\_ 4A



**HISTORIC TREASURE**  
FEDERAL FUNDS FOR EL MORRO  
AND SAN CRISTOBAL \_\_\_\_\_ 4B



## SIX MONTHS OF RESULTS

Luis Fortuño's first six months as Resident Commissioner in Washington have stood out for achieving unprecedented results on behalf of Puerto Rico.

Fulfilling his commitment of being a full-time Resident Commissioner working on behalf of all Puerto Ricans, Fortuño has introduced eight bills and co-sponsored more than 70 legislative measures so far this session. In such a short time, his leadership has been recognized to such a degree that his colleagues elected him Vice-President of the 109th Congress

Republican freshman class and Vice-Chair of the Hispanic Congressional Conference. In addition, he was selected by Congressional leaders to be a member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, the first time ever a Resident Commissioner has sat in such a prestigious panel. They also included him in the U.S. delegation attending the investiture of Pope Benedict XVI in Rome.



Luis Fortuño juramenta como miembro del Congreso junto a su familia ante el presidente de la Cámara de Representantes Dennis Hastert (Illinois).

It was precisely through his participation in the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee that he obtained over \$800 million in transportation and infrastructure funds for the Island. These funds include \$45 million for new projects, an amount that is three times higher than that authorized by the House last Congress.

In the area of environmental protection, his first bill designating 10,000 acres in El Yunque as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System was approved by the House and Senate committees with

jurisdiction in record time. It is expected to go to final floor vote fairly soon to be followed by President Bush's signing into law.

Regarding education, he has advocated for increasing Pell Grant funds for Puerto Rico's college students. In addition, he has promoted the integration of linguistically diverse children and parents into the Head Start program and announced the appropriation of \$7 million for island higher-education institutions under the federal Student Aid Program.

Fortuño was also one of the leaders fighting to ensure that the CDBG and CSBG programs remain in place. These programs are very important to our cities and non-profit organizations. Moreover, thanks to his efforts an estimated 150,000 families in Puerto Rico will continue to benefit from the Child Tax Credit.

Our veterans are a priority for the Resident

Commissioner, and in just six months, he has been able to secure Congressional commitment for the improvement of the Veterans' Hospital in Puerto Rico while actively promoting the construction of a new outpatient clinic in the Eastern region of the island and a new national cemetery.

Finally, Fortuño fought hard in Congress, the Pentagon and the White House not only for Fort Buchanan to remain open, but also to do away with a ban on all new base construction imposed by Congress in 2001. This has been a great accomplishment that no one would have expected six months ago.



## Desde Washington

With this publication we mark the beginning of the office of the Resident Commissioner's newsletter, as I complete my sixth month since my swearing in as Puerto Rico's representative in the U.S. Congress. Through it, I hope to keep you abreast of the efforts that I have made and will continue to make in Washington for your benefit and that of your family.

During the past six months, I have worked around the clock in our nation's capital to represent all Puerto Ricans with dignity. That was my commitment to you and, with God's help, I am fully honoring it.

The results of these efforts, some of which we mention in this newsletter, are clear... more than \$800 million for transportation and infrastructure projects, promoting the integration of linguistically diverse children and parents into the Head Start program, the permanence of Fort Buchanan, the first steps toward improving medical facilities for our veterans, the designation of 10,000 acres in El Yunque as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System and the commitment of Congressional leaders to provide equal treatment to Puerto Rico for the Medicare program, among others.

And this is just the beginning. I am confident that together, we will be able to continue working to build on what we have already accomplished. As I have always said, enough promises have been made, it's time to produce results.

*Luis Fortuño*

## 2A TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

### \$825 Million for Transportation and Infrastructure

In just his second month as Resident Commissioner, Luis Fortuño obtained an unprecedented amount in funds for transportation and infrastructure projects in Puerto Rico. As a member of the prestigious Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, he was co-sponsor, along with Committee Chairman Don Young, of the bill (H.R. 3) that reauthorizes federal transportation funds for the next six years.

This measure, which has already passed the House, includes an allocation of \$825 million for Puerto Rico, \$45 million of which were designated for almost 20 specific projects throughout the island. This allocation is three times higher than what was allocated for Puerto Rico during the previous Congress. These projects include: \$5 million to complete PR-10 which will connect Ponce and Arecibo; \$5 million to finish the portion of PR-53 between Yabucoa and Maunabo; \$1.9 million for PR-9922, known as the Las



Luis Fortuño y el Presidente de la Comisión de Transportación Don Young, visitan la base de la Guardia Costanera en San Juan.

Piedras connector; \$6 million to PR-111 in Moca; \$2 million for the acquisition of new public transportation vessels between Fajardo, Vieques and Culebra; \$3 million for a new public transportation system in El Yunque; \$4 million for the acquisition of 25 new buses and \$3 million for the installation of security cameras in the AMA's existing fleet of 340 buses; and \$3 million for the restoration of Old San Juan cobble stones, among others. In addition, the bill authorizes the extension of the Tren Urbano to both Minillas and Carolina.

"It's important for us to develop an integrated transportation system based on the best use of available resources, timeliness, quality and user safety. The monies I have obtained will also give Puerto Rico's construction industry a much needed capital injection, promoting economic development and social justice in our island," said Fortuño.

## 2B EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

### Fortuño Plays Active Role in Education Committee

Since he arrived in Congress, Luis Fortuño's role as a member of the Education and the Workforce Committee has been very prominent.

Early on during this congressional session, he introduced two amendments to the Job Training Improvement Act, a measure to promote the availability of job training programs for the unemployed. The House unanimously approved both amendments which provide for the inclusion of English language courses as part of those job-training programs.

In addition, he obtained unanimous approval for several amendments he presented to the legislation reauthorizing the Head Start program. The purpose of the amendments was to facilitate early English instruction to all linguistically diverse children. "Early education is key to



Luis Fortuño visits the Jane Stern Library in Dorado during Library Week to speak on the importance of reading.

the future of our children. It's important to provide them with all possible tools, and there is no doubt that knowing two languages strengthens their skills and makes them more competitive," the Resident Commissioner said.

He is also advocating in defense of funds for the TRIO programs, which provide basic services to almost 22,000 students in Puerto Rico, and to increase Pell Grants funds. In addition, his agenda includes promoting the development of

graduate programs and improving special education services and funding.

"My commitment is to be a strong advocate in Congress on behalf of an educational system that doesn't fail our families and that offers our children an excellent education in a safe environment," Fortuño said.



## 3B VETERANS

# Plans to Build a New Hospital Right on Track

Thanks to Luis Fortuño's efforts, and the support of the main veterans' associations in Puerto Rico, improvements to the hospital and the possibility of building a replacement are closer than ever.

As part of the strategy to promote improvements to the existing medical facilities, Fortuño met with Veterans Affairs Secretary Jim Nicholson, White House officials, and leaders of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees. He succeeded in having the Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Committee include report language in its FY 06 bill recognizing the need for major medical facilities improvements in Puerto Rico and directing the Veterans' Affairs Department to report, by no later than September 30th of this year, on the feasibility of building a new hospital, instead of continue spending millions of dollars upgrading an antiquated and obsolete facility.

Even though the Committee recognizes the need for a new hospital, the reality is that its construction can take several years. For that reason, the Committee is also directing the Department to implement the most urgent upgrades in order for the Hospital to continue servicing our veterans.

"The language approved by the Committee guarantees improvements to the existing hospital while at the same time calls for an exhaustive review of the needs of the Island's veterans and how advantageous building a new facility will be to meet those needs," Fortuño said.

The Resident Commissioner's legislative agenda regarding veterans also includes the construction of a new outpatient clinic in the Eastern region and a new national cemetery.



## Purple Heart for Boricua Hero

Luis Fortuño along with soldier Emanuel Meléndez Díaz and his family after he was awarded a Purple Heart medal granted by President Bush and a flag that waved over the U.S. Capitol in his honor. Meléndez, of Comerío, is recovering from

injuries suffered during the Iraq war. "Emanuel is a role model for our youth and a true hero," said the Resident Commissioner, who also spoke about the young soldier's bravery in a speech delivered on the House Floor last March 2.

## 3A FORT BUCHANAN

# Fortuño's Efforts Manage to Keep Fort Buchanan Open and Obtain Moratorium Review

One of Luis Fortuño's challenges in Washington was tackling the imminent closing of Fort Buchanan.

Fort Buchanan, with a history that dates back to the Spanish-American War, has supported hundreds of thousands of Puerto Rican veterans and soldiers who have served in the Armed Forces since 1917.

After intensive lobbying, the Resident Commissioner got the House and Senate Armed Forces Committees to review the ban of all construction at Fort Buchanan imposed by Congress in 2001 in response to the events that culminated with the closing of the Navy installations in Vieques. Thanks to this change, many of the construction projects that were put on hold over the past four years can now move forward.

These efforts were also vital in the Pentagon's decision



The Resident Commissioner participates, along with Congressman Jerry Weller from Illinois, in an event sponsored by the Committee for the Permanence of Fort Buchanan to keep the base open held in front of the installation.

against recommending Fort Buchanan's closing to the Base Closure and Commission (BRAC). Fortuño, who held meetings with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, BRAC Chairman Anthony Principi, representatives from the Pentagon and the White House, and Congressional leaders, also obtained the full support of the main Puerto Rican veterans' organizations, who unanimously approved a resolution opposing the closing.

"Keeping Fort Buchanan open is of vital importance due

to the support it provides to our soldiers, veterans and their families; their direct and indirect impact on the local economy; and its strategic value for our national defense. This accomplishment is a well-deserved recognition of the Puerto Rican men and women who risk their lives every day to defend our great Nation," Fortuño stated.

## 4A ENVIRONMENT

# Fortuño Is Recognized For His Efforts On Behalf Of The Environment

Since he arrived in Congress, Luis Fortuño has introduced several pieces of legislation to protect the environment. In fact, his first bill in Congress (H.R. 539) provides for the designation of 10,000 acres of land in El Yunque as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System. This designation would ensure the protection of this piece of land, which is in its natural state, for future generations. Several national environmental organizations, such as the Wilderness Society, the National Hispanic Environmental Council and the American Birds Conservancy praised his leadership in introducing said bill.

"We are excited that Congressman Fortuño has stepped forward to champion this legislation so early in his freshman year," said Wilderness Society President William Meadows. As a member of the Resources Committee and with the support of Senator Hillary Clinton (NY) and Congressman Richard Pombo (CA), Fortuño has managed to get this bill approved by the House and Senate committees with



The Resident Commissioner participates in the groundbreaking ceremony of the new Puerto Rican parrot aviary in El Yunque. With a \$1.7 million contribution from the federal government, this aviary will help protect the endangered Puerto Rican parrot and increase its population.

jurisdiction and the same is expected to go to a final vote on the floor of both chambers and to be signed by President Bush soon.

He also introduced a bill (H.R. 1644) for the conservation of the karst region, which extends from the municipality of Aguadilla to the municipality of Loiza and is a recharge area for a large portion of the aquifers in the northern part of the island, providing drinking water to almost a fourth of our population. This initiative authorizes the acquisition and management of land within the karst region for conservation and recreation purposes. "The protection of the karst region is essential to guarantee our water supply, the protection of more than 220 bird species and 34 threatened or endangered wildlife species. It also includes the preservation of the

Encantado River, which is one of the longest underground rivers in the world," said the Resident Commissioner.

## 4B HISTORIC TREASURE

# More than \$1 Million in Federal Funds for Renovations in El Morro and San Cristobal

The Resident Commissioner has obtained more than \$1 million in federal funds for the maintenance and repairs of the San Felipe del Morro and San Cristóbal historic structures. Fortuño made the announcement during a recent visit to both forts, along with National Parks System Director Fran Mainella. These funds, which include \$140,000 to repair the sewer system at Fort San Cristóbal, \$243,000 for the renovation of El Morro's public restrooms and \$310,000 to make improvements to the highway that provides access to the fort, were obtained as part of the congressional appropriations process.

Fortuño and Mainella also visited the Santo Tomás bastion, where a historic wall over 70 feet high,



Luis Fortuño along with National Park Service officials during the announcement of federal funds obtained for various renovation projects of the San Felipe del Morro and San Cristóbal forts.

located close to La Perla and just off Norzagaray Street, fell more than a year ago. Repairs to the wall

are awaiting the Government of Puerto Rico to issue the necessary construction permits and repairs the adjacent street. During the visit, the Resident Commissioner and Mainella announced that the National Park Service has allocated an initial \$430,000 amount to repair the wall. Fortuño has also obtained an increase in the funds both forts receive annually, which will offer stability to some of their contract employees and improve their maintenance.

"More than 1.2 million people from all over the world visit these forts every year. El Morro and San Cristóbal are treasures, not only of Puerto Rico, but also of humanity. It's our duty to ensure that, like us, future generations get to enjoy these historic monuments," the commissioner said.



## 5A STATUS



The Resident Commissioner and his wife, Lucé, with President Bush after a legislative strategy meeting the President held with Members of Congress....

# White House Report on Puerto Rico's Status Will Soon Be Released

The century-old dilemma about the political relation between Puerto Rico and the United States will once again be a topic of conversation in our Nation's capital.

After four years of inactivity at the local level, and of lack of interest in taking the discussion to the federal arena, the Resident Commissioner has brought up in Washington the need to find a permanent solution to Puerto Rico's status issue. "Despite the current impasse that exists on the Island as a result of the unfortunate veto by Governor Acevedo Vilá of the historic status bill, unanimously approved by the Legislature, I will continue my efforts in Washington to advance the debate about this issue," Fortuño said.

In fact, the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico Status is expected to issue its report on the future of the political relation between Puerto Rico and the United States fairly soon. This report must include an analysis of status options that are acceptable to the federal govern-

ment and recommendations to the President and Congress on how to proceed regarding this issue. The Resident Commissioner, who has met several times with Administration and Congressional leaders to urge action by the Federal Government, said, "it's time for us to deal with this issue seriously. I'm convinced that it will be up to this generation of Puerto Rican men and women to decide, once and for all, Puerto Rico's colonial problem. Those who run away from this historic responsibility, do a disservice to our people."

Fortuño, who has also discussed the status issue in several speeches on the House floor, added that, "what we need is for Congress to provide us, for the first time in history, with the tools so that we can choose in an informed manner between status options that are permanent, non-territorial, and non-colonial. The White House report will greatly help us get this process underway."

## 5B FAITH BASED AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

# Fortuño Inaugurates Municipal Liaison Offices to Faith-Based and Community Organizations

The Resident Commissioner has joined President Bush's initiative to promote and strengthen faith-based and community organizations. As part of his plan, Fortuño has focused on the promotion and opening of municipal offices to assist the various existing community organizations on the island so that they can reach the highest level of self-sufficiency and establish working partnerships that help promote their social agenda. With the support of the mayors of San Sebastián, Aguada, Arecibo, Morovis, Moca, Lares, Barceloneta, Loíza, Toa Baja and Florida, this initiative already has ten liaison offices. It is expected that as part of this initiative, at least 30 such offices will open over the next year.

"The opening of these offices comes from the simple realization that we can do more together. The fact is that municipal governments, along with the state government, must establish partnerships with faith-based and community organizations to combat together the social ills that we face daily. These organizations do a commendable job day after day, and my commitment is to help them so that they have the necessary tools to continue their work," the Resident Commissioner said.



# Participation in Investiture of Pope Benedict XVI

The Resident Commissioner was selected by House Speaker Dennis Hastert (Illinois) and Senate Majority Leader William Frist (Tennessee) as part of the delegation of 22 Members of Congress who represented the government of the United States in the investiture ceremonies for Pope Benedict XVI in the Vatican. "As a Puerto Rican, I feel truly honored

that the Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader would make me part of the Congressional Delegation that represented our nation during this historic event," Fortuño said.

In this photo, he participates during the ceremony with Congressmen Michael McCaul (Texas) and Daniel Lungren (California).

# Ambitious Health Agenda: Equality in the Medicare Program Closer Than Ever

Resident Commissioner Luis Fortuño and Senator Rick Santorum, Chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, introduced legislation that provides for Puerto Rico to receive equal treatment in terms of the reimbursements that hospitals receive for services provided to Medicare patients. Currently, Puerto Rico hospitals are required to comply with the same Medicare standards of participation as hospitals on the mainland, but the reimbursement they receive is just 75%, while the 50 states and other territories receive 100%.

"The purpose of this bill is to rectify an inequity that has existed for the past 20 years in Medicare reimbursements to Puerto Rico's hospitals. Not receiving an 100% reimbursement for their services to Medicare patients places our hospitals at a financial disadvantage that affects not only the services they offer, but also their ability to buy new equipment and technology, and pay health professionals better salaries," Fortuño said.

The bill introduced in the Senate (S. 862) is co-sponsored by Senators Mary Landrieu and the House version (H.R. 1729) is co-sponsored by 20 members of Congress from both parties. This effort is also supported by health organizations such as the Puerto Rico Hospitals Association, the Federation of American Hospitals and the

American Hospitals Association.

The Resident Commissioner is also working toward an increase in the reimbursements received by island hospitals for services provided to low-income patients under the Disproportionate Share (DSH) program. Puerto Rico does not receive equal treatment under this program because it is not a state.

He also met with U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt to discuss health issues that affect Puerto Rico residents. Among other topics, he brought to the attention of Secretary Leavitt, the devastating effects caused by the unequal treatment the island receives under the Medicaid and Medicare programs, the deterioration in mental health

services, and the employee retaining crisis brought upon by health professionals who are forced to leave the island seeking better salaries and work conditions offered in the 50 States.

"Having access to quality health services must be a right, not a privilege to some. Getting better treatment for Puerto Rico under the Medicare and Medicaid programs is a commitment that I made to the people of Puerto Rico, and President Bush's Administration is committed to help us accomplish that goal," stated Fortuño.



The Resident Commissioner during a work session with U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt to discuss health care priorities for Puerto Rico.

## INFONEWS



Miss Gabriela Nevárez represented Puerto Rico in the Cherry Blossom Festival, which took place in Washington DC during the month of April. Gabriela, born in Guaynabo, has just concluded her sophomore year studying marketing at American University in Washington, DC.

The Cherry Blossom Festival, a tradition since 1935, celebrates the blooming of the cherry blossom trees given as gifts to the city of Washington by the Japanese government. Miss Nevárez was an excellent representative of Puerto Rico during this prestigious festival.

The Resident Commissioner congratulates Gabriela for representing Puerto Rico and all participants in the Cherry Blossom Festival.

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